



# The Journal

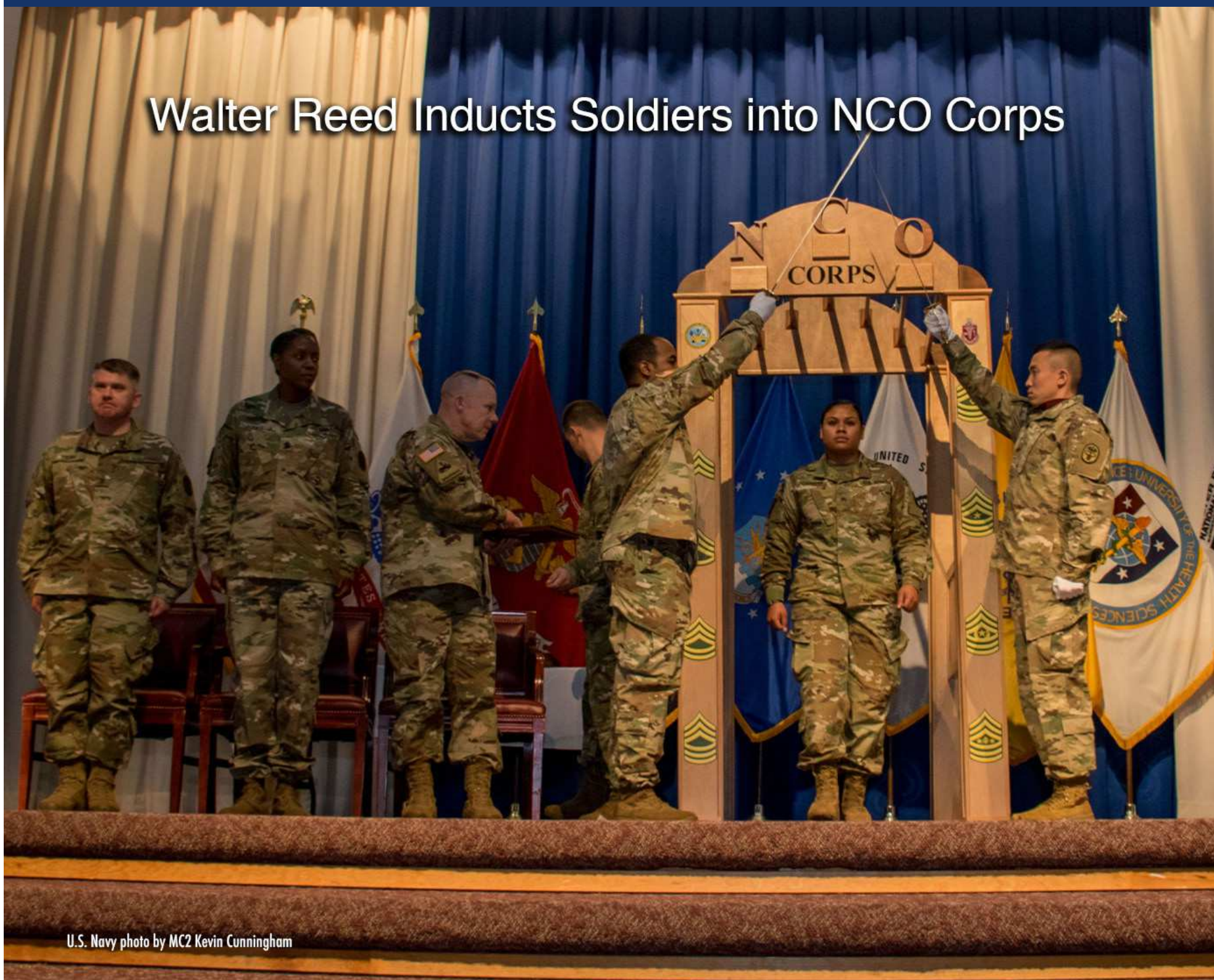
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June 8, 2017

## Walter Reed Inducts Soldiers into NCO Corps



U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Kevin Cunningham



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Researchers to  
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# NSAB Holds Frocking Ceremony

Photos by Jeremy Brooks  
NSAB Public Affairs

Naval Support Activity Bethesda held a frocking ceremony June 5. The event was a promotion ceremony for the four Sailors that were “frocked” (or promoted) to their next rank by being “pinned” with new collar insignia by their family, friends, and peers.



## Bethesda Notebook

### Army Birthday Celebration

Walter Reed Bethesda celebrates the 242nd birthday of the U.S. Army during morning colors on June 8 at 8 a.m. in front of the Tower (Building 1). All are invited to attend.

### Master Clinician Recognition

Walter Reed Bethesda’s Master Clinician Recognition Program will be June 16 at noon in Memorial Auditorium. All staff members are invited. The program recognizes the medical center’s master and associate master clinicians.

### Cancer Awareness Events

The John P. Murtha Cancer Center at Walter Reed Bethesda hosts its Annual Cancer Research Seminar on June 19 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Cancer Awareness Day on June 20 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Both events will be in the America Building at Walter Reed Bethesda. For more information, contact Sylvan McDowell at 301-295-9320 or Reisha Maharaj at 301-319-3487.

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# Inspirational Walter Reed Bethesda Employee Retires

By Bernard S. Little  
WRNMMC Command Communications

Donna Thornton is a bit of a celebrity at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Actress Kirstie Alley portrayed her in the 2003 television movie “Profoundly Normal,” with actor Delroy Lindo portraying Thornton’s husband Ricardo.

The movie depicts the many obstacles the Thorntons faced trying to live normally despite prejudice and barriers they overcame because of the attitudes of others concerning the couple’s mental abilities and race. When she was 10, Donna was sent to Forest Haven, a live-in facility for children and adults with intellectual disabilities in Laurel, Maryland. Donna met Ricardo there, where their fight for independence to leave the facility and live on their own, as well to get married and have a child, captured the attention of many.

But it isn’t the movie that’s made Donna so popular at WRNMMC and its predecessor Walter Reed Army Medical Center. It’s her strength and personality that attract those who have met her over the course of her 28 years of dedicated service.

Although short in stature (at well under 5 feet tall), Donna possesses a big personality and sharp wit, and people who know her attest to her inner fortitude. She’s a fighter; they say, standing up for what she believes in, which over the years has included her battles to live independently, marry Ricardo, have a child and raise him successfully when others said she wouldn’t be able to do any of it.

Others also doubted Donna would work at Walter Reed Bethesda for nearly three decades, but she never doubted it — dutifully and proudly performing her housekeeping tasks each day at the medical center that served as her second home.

On May 31, Donna retired from the job to which she has diligently showed up over the years, even making the trek to work through snowstorms at the “old” Walter Reed, it was practically walking distance from their home, joked Ricardo during her retirement ceremony May 25 at WRNMMC.

“Donna’s a handful,” laughed Lorenzo Barnes, a supervisor in the Facilities Department at WRNMMC



PHOTO BY BERNARD S. LITTLE

**Ricardo and Donna Thornton celebrate her retirement from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at a ceremony May 25.**

and a co-worker of hers since 1991. “She’ll tell you in a minute, ‘Get out of my face,’ but it’s been a wonderful ride with Donna because I can come to work angry, and she’ll say, ‘Unh-uh!’ She keeps me straight on a day-to-day basis. I look at her as I would a member of my family.”

Donna thanked her co-workers, “all of them” she has worked with over the years. “I will never, ever forget [them]. They’re in my prayers every day,” she said through tears after receiving a bouquet of rose from her husband. The two married in 1984.

“I want to thank all of you for the love you have shown Donna through the years,” said Ricardo. “I was trying hard to bring my son, Ricky Jr., here today [for the retirement ceremony], because he’s the future.”

Recalling 60 Minutes covering the birth of their son in 1986, Ricardo explained one of the questions he remembered Donna asked the doctors then was, “Will my baby be able to love me [with] my abilities?” He said this let many people know then it wasn’t about the couple’s perceived mental disabilities, but their abilities to be good, productive, strong parents and hardworking people in the community. Their son now has a family of his own.

Donna intends to spend time with her grandchildren, in addition to visiting Hawaii, as part of her retirement plans.

She also speaks of continuing to advocate for and help

people with disabilities, which she has done throughout the years, including trips to Capitol Hill to testify and speak with members of Congress on these issues, as well as a visited the White House where she met President Bill Clinton. Ricardo still teases her about Clinton’s friendly kiss on her cheek.

“We already know she’s still going to be busy, so Donna, keep doing your thing,” Barnes said.

“Oh, I will,” she quickly replied.

George Donovan, housekeeping program analyst and Donna’s supervisor, said her story of overcoming numerous challenges and naysayers has served as a strong motivation for many other people, including her colleagues.

“Her personality encourages everyone else to do the best they can,” said Donovan. He added she radiates kindness. “Working at Walter Reed over the years, I’ve gotten the opportunity to meet presidents and other VIPs, but Donna is the best thing to happen to me here and at the top of my list. You are going to be truly missed.”

Navy Cmdr. Gregg Benton, chief of the Facilities Management Department at WRNMMC, presented Donna with a flag flown over the medical center, and Navy Lt. j.g. Sanjay Selvam, assistant chief of FMD, presented her with her federal government retirement certificate and pin.

Benton said nearly every day Donna gives him a thumbs-up when she sees him, and always asks him about his children, if he is keeping them safe and about his plans for the weekend. “I really appreciate everything she has done for us, our country and the barriers she has broken through,” he added.

Bobby Potts, Donna’s residential manager, also attended her retirement ceremony. “I have seen the love and support Donna received from those she’s worked with over the years,” he said. “I’ve been with Donna and Ricardo for 32 years, so we’re like family.”

Army Col. Charles Unruh, director for administration at WRNMMC, was also on hand to congratulate the Thorntons. “I want to thank you Ma’am for what you have done to inspire me.” He added that those who’ve heard or seen her story usually come away with the thought, “How do I be more like Donna?”

“Everybody you’ve touched during your time here will be better because of it,” Unruh added.

## Soldiers Inducted Into NCO Corps

By WRNMMC Command Communications

U.S. Army Element Troop Command-North at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) inducted approximately 20 new noncommissioned officers (NCOs) into the NCO Corps during a ceremony May 25 at WRNMMC.

The time-honored Army tradition of inducting Soldiers into the NCO Corps dates back to 1775, beginning not long after the U.S. Army was established on June 14 of that year.

Before being inducted into the NCO Corps, Soldiers must demonstrate a desire and ability to lead as noncommissioned officers, considered to be the “backbone of the American Army,” according to U.S. Army Element Troop Command North Soldiers who organized the induction ceremony.

Organizers said candidates for the NCO Corps also must exhibit leadership skills, complete a course concerning military leadership, and pass a board consisting of senior NCOs before they can

be inducted into the corps.

During the ceremony Soldiers dressed in Army uniforms from throughout its 242-year history gave a dramatic presentation of the “Soldier Request and NCO Response.” First sergeants from three of the U.S. Army Element Troop Command-North companies lit candles symbolizing an important part of Army history.

The red candle represented valor, blood, sweat and the tears of Soldiers from the Revolutionary War to the present. The white candle signified purity and innocence, as well as a peer spirit and camaraderie. The blue candle denoted perseverance and justice, along with the strength and mettle of the NCO Corps and its Soldiers’ refusal to compromise on standards.

The ceremony not only celebrated the newly-promoted NCOs joining the ranks of the NCO Corps, but also honored the memory of those corps members, past and present, who have served with pride and distinction in the U.S. Army, organizers said.

Regional Health Command- Atlantic Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Brady served guest speaker for the



PHOTO BY MC2 KEVIN CUNNINGHAM

**Command Sgt. Maj. Michelle Jones, senior enlisted leader for the U.S. Army Element-North, give the NCO oath to the new inductees into the NCO Corps during an induction ceremony May 25 at Walter Reed Bethesda.**

ceremony, stressing to the new NCOs the importance of their leadership roles in the Army. Command Sgt. Maj. Michelle Jones, senior enlisted leader for the U.S. Army Element-North, gave the NCO oath to the new inductees, and all NCOs present recited the NCO Creed. The ceremony concluded with the singing of the Army service song.



# The Pitts Family: a Daughter Donates Her Kidney to Save Her Mother

By AJ Simmons  
WRNMMC Command Communications

It was October of 2016 when Vicki Pitts, 69, was diagnosed with renal failure from stage five Kidney Disease. Shocked and terrified by the news, she was immediately sent to the Department of Nephrology at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC). She said that it was here she learned she had the choice between pursuing a transplant or going on dialysis.

"I knew I wanted a transplant," explained Vicki. "And that's when the daughter comes into the story."

Accompanied by her family, Vicki returned to WRNMMC to discuss the details and process involved with joining the transplant list. Joining this, she was assessed for her placement on the list.

Vicki's daughter, Jennifer, was among the family that came with her to WRNMMC that day. Observing the discussion of Vicki's placement on the transplant list, Jennifer came to a conclusion. She knew she wanted to volunteer one of her own kidneys to save her mother's life.

"My mom said she didn't know if I would want to do it," said Jennifer. Her reply to her mother was simple and heartfelt, as she said, "You gave me life, so of course I want to give it back to you."

At the beginning of testing Jennifer was warned by her Living Donor Coordinator that children are often not a donor match for their parents, as the antibodies transferred during birth often cause complications in the transplant process.

"They kept saying 'Don't get too excited. It probably won't be you. It'll probably be another family member,'" said Jennifer. "But I just knew it was going to be me."

Fortunately for the Pitts family, their circumstance



PHOTO COURTESY JENNIFER PITTS

**Jennifer Pitts (left) donated one of her kidneys to her mother Vicki (right) after Vickie was diagnosed with renal failure in October 2016. The transplant took place at Walter Reed Bethesda in March, providing Vicki with an early Mother's Day gift from her daughter, she said.**

was a rare exception to the norm. One week after being tested, Jennifer was contacted with the news that she was a match for her mother.

Vicki described the moment she received the call from Jennifer telling her through joyful tears that they were a match. "For her to be my match is incredible," said Vicki. "It is a miracle."

After three months of preparation, which included several preparatory surgeries to increase the likelihood of a successful transplant, the day of the transplant arrived. Vicki and Jennifer confirmed that both surgeries were successful and completed with no significant complications.

Following surgery, they stayed in Walter Reed's Fisher House for one month, where they were able to remain close to one another as they healed. Both Vicki and Jennifer lauded the attentive care they received from the Walter Reed Bethesda staff.

"Everyone at Walter Reed—from the floor to the transplant team—just really answers any questions you have and makes sure you're really comfortable with everything," explained Jennifer as she recalled the days surrounding the procedure.

"You can call them any time, day or night," said Vicki in agreement with her daughter. "That really gives you the feeling that you're at the right hospital."

Today, five weeks after the successful kidney transplant, Vicki and Jennifer say they are in good health and are completing their recovery.

Vicki was quick to acknowledge and praise the generosity of the military families that they have met throughout the years, many of whom sent gifts, cards and even chicken soup to help the Pitts family through the process. "The families that we met 30 years ago are still here touching our lives now," she said.

Both Vicki and Jennifer explained that the kindness of the military families in their lives during the transplant has inspired them to extend that selflessness to others in need, particularly those awaiting transplants on the donor list.

Vicki said that this is the best mother's day gift she could have ever been given, calling it "the gift that keeps on giving."

One thing is undoubtedly clear: the Pitts family had a very special reason to celebrate Mother's Day this year.

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	10 am	<b>Color Me 5K</b> <b>MWR Sports Complex</b> Register by 6/8: <a href="http://nsabcolorme5k2017.eventbrite.com">nsabcolorme5k2017.eventbrite.com</a> Registration includes food, *t-shirt, color packet, eye protection and headband.
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	6-9 pm	<b>Daddy Daughter Dance</b> , Bldg. 17 Gymnasium Register by 6/14: <a href="http://daddy-daughter-dance-2017.eventbrite.com">daddy-daughter-dance-2017.eventbrite.com</a>
6/23	5 pm	<b>Nationals vs. Reds Baseball Game</b> Open to All \$50, Liberty Price \$25*
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# The Power of Nature:

## Green Road Project to Study Nature's Healing Effects

By Sarah Marshall  
USU External Affairs

It's long been said that being outside, experiencing the sights and sounds of nature, can help ease our ailments, but there has been no physiological evidence to prove this theory. Now, researchers at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) are embarking on a collaborative study seeking to scientifically measure the healing effects of nature.

Over the last few years, researchers from USU's Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP) have been working with architects and engineers as part of an effort known as the Green Road Project. These efforts have led to a Green Road site being built on the Naval Support Activity Bethesda – one of six nationwide – which will help scientifically measure the effects of nature, while providing a tranquil environment for service members and their families. The project is led by the Institute for Integrative Health, with funding by the TKF Foundation, and also includes collaboration with scientists from the University of Arizona at Tucson, the Massachusetts General Hospital, and the National Institutes of Health.

The Green Road site includes a paved pathway that meanders through the wooded area behind USU, leading over to Sanctuary Hall – living quarters for Walter Reed patients and their caregivers during long-term care. Those

who traverse the path can take a seat on a large bench covered by a wooden awning, from which they can enjoy a breath-taking view of the vast wooded area populated with tall trees, white-tail deer, and the sounds of birds chirping – not to mention plenty of fresh air. There's also a pavilion, complete with picnic tables, a babbling water fountain, and a sitting area made out of large rocks right beside a small, trickling stream.

This year, USU researchers plan to begin using the site to measure the healing effects of those who spend time on the Green Road, as opposed to traversing through busier, less “green” parts of the base, explained Patricia Deuster, PhD, professor in USU's Military and Emergency Medicine Department and director of CHAMP. They'll look to enroll service members from all branches, as well as wounded warriors, and caregivers, and any others who can access the base and therefore the site. It's important to look at each of these populations, Deuster noted, to see how a healthy person responds to the different pathways, as compared to how a patient responds, or how a caregiver may respond.

Those enrolled in the study will begin in CHAMP's lab, in Building 53 near Sanctuary Hall, where they will be prepared to wear mechanisms for monitoring heart rate and collecting sweat before beginning their walk through either the Green Road site or the other busier path, Deuster said. After walking either path, they'll return



PHOTO BY SARAH MARSHALL

**First year medical students at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) Army 2nd Lt. Mary Thomas and Navy Ensign Lucy Yuan recently traverse the Green Road site, located on Naval Support Activity Bethesda, behind USU.**

to the lab, where researchers will remove the mechanisms, measuring their heart rate variability and biomarkers in sweat.

Part of their research objective, she added, is to look at these biological measures and gather evidence-based, quantifiable data, without too much burden on participants. They're also looking to measure the psychological effects, and will do so by having participants complete a questionnaire and engage in a conversation about their experience after walking the different pathways.

“Our hope is to show that nature does have an effect on the population and caregivers,” she said.

Their primary focus is on the military community, and continuously seeking

ways to help all service members perform optimally in all aspects that impact them – psychologically, physiologically, spiritually, and socially, she said. But they also hope these data will translate to the rest of the population, perhaps by producing evidence that schools, for example, should allow children more time outside during recess, or that nursing homes should aim to take their patients outside more often.

As an added bonus, the Green Road is available to patients, caregivers, and staff, to simply enjoy the beauty of nature.

“It's a place where you can go and recover, restore who you are ... forget about the stressors of life for a moment, and just allow your body to relax, and regenerate,” she said.



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